

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AGR-20 IGA-02 SSO-00 SPC-03 AID-20

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9626

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 8044

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EAGR

SUBJ: PRESIDENT PASTRANA COMMENTS ON COLOMBIAN
NEED FOR PL-480

REF: (A) BOGOTA 7941 (B) BOGOTA 7861

(1) AS INDICATED IN REF A PRESIDENT PASTRANA EXPRESSED
CONSIDERABLE DISTRESS OVER THE SALE OF 16 MILLION
TONS OF U.S. GRAINS TO THE USSR AND STATED THAT HE
FOUND THIS SALE HARD TO COMPREHEND IN THE LIGHT OF
SUBSEQUENT ASTRONOMICAL INCREASES IN THE COST OF
GRAIN PARTICULARLY WHEAT TO COLOMBIA AND IN VIEW
OF THE BLEAK OUTLOOK FOR COLOMBIA RECEIVING PL-480
WHEAT DURING THE CRUCIAL MONTHS AHEAD.

(2) HE NOTED THAT EXTREMIST ELEMENTS SUCH AS ANAPO WERE
LOOKING FOR A SENSITIVE POLITICAL ISSUE LIKE
RISING FOOD COSTS TO EXPLOIT. IN AN EFFORT TO DENY
THEM THIS ISSUE AS WELL AS HOLD DOWN PRICES OF BASIC
FOOD STAPLES THE GOC WAS SUBSIDIZING THE DIFFERENCE
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BETWEEN THE COST OF IMPORTED COMMODITIES INCLUDING

WHEAT, CORN, SOYBEANS AND SKIM MILK AND THE LOWER DOMESTIC PRICES. THE COST OF THIS SUBSIDY WAS CAUSING SERIOUS BUDGETARY DIFFICULTIES WHICH COULD ONLY BE ALLEVIATED BY PURCHASE OF PART OF COLOMBIA FOOD IMPORT REQUIREMENTS UNDER PL-480 (SEE REF B).

(3) SIMILAR CONCERN WAS EXPRESSED BY VICE MINAG LAFARUIE TO DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SZABO IN SEPTEMBER 26 MEETING. SZABO NOTED THAT THE U.S. SUPPLY SITUATION REMAINED EXTREMELY TIGHT FOR WHEAT AND FEEDGRAINS BUT OFFERED TO LOOK INTO THE LATEST COLOMBIAN PL-480 REQUEST ON HIS RETURN TO WASHINGTON.

(4) COMMENT: THE REMARKS OF PRESIDENT PASTRANA AND THE VICE MINAG UNDERSCORE THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE FOOD/BUDGET SITUATION HERE AND THE URGENT COLOMBIAN NEED FOR PL-480 ASSISTANCE. WHILE GOC OFFICIALS FROM THE PRESIDENT ON DOWN RECOGNIZE THAT U.S. GRAIN SUPPLIES ARE TIGHT THEY ARE NOT SYMPATHETIC TO THE IDEA THAT THE US CANNOT HELP THEM THIS YEAR WHEN WE SOLD 16 MILLION TONS OF GRAIN TO THE USSR LAST YEAR AT BARGAIN PRICES COMPARED WITH CURRENT LEVELS. WHILE GIVEN THE PRESENT SUPPLY/DEMAND SITUATION WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO FULLY MEET THE COLOMBIAN PL-480 REQUEST FOR 60,000 TONS OF WHEAT, 40,000 TONS OF SORGHUM AND 10,000 TONS OF REFINED SOYBEAN OIL, I HOPE IN VIEW OF THE IMPORTANT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVED THAT EVERY EFFORT WILL BE MADE TO DO WHAT WE CAN IN RESPONDING POSITIVELY AND QUICKLY TO THIS REQUEST.

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